

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dry Gulch Outfitter Guide proposal is planned to offer options in skiing to Loveland customers. The snow cat trip to the Dry Gulch area will change the exiting use patterns in the area: however, these changes are relegated the 580 acres of the proposed area. The management action is consistent with the forest plan for the area. Recreationists will not be restricted from the area except temporarily for avalanche control safety. Forest visitors will still be able to use Dry Gulch for back country skiing. The social setting will slightly change from potentially one visitor at one time to potentially 16 visitors at one time. This will be an average of 2.7 visitors per acre in the project area. The proposed project is within the Rural ROS area which is designated for high use and social encounters. The snow cat will bring more vehicle sounds to the Dry Gulch. The forest plan management area 8.22 describes this area designated for high use with sounds of people and vehicles. The project will bring changes to the Dry Gulch setting but the changes are consistent with the forest plan.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

See the project purpose and need and proposed action for proposal specifics.



View of Dry Gulch. Looking south east to timberline and hwy 70



Looking north west at proposed outfitter guide usage area from near the south drop off point.

Existing Recreation setting – The Dry Gulch is located along the Continental Divide, with the Interstate 70 corridor to the south east and Herman gulch to the north. The area contains high-elevation, rugged lands ranging in elevation from about 10,500 feet to the Hagar Mt at 13,220 on the North West corner of the valley about 75% of the gulch is above tree line and consists of alpine meadow and mostly steep rock slopes. Lodge pole pine stands and dense spruce and fir stands cover the lower quarter of the valley. The vegetation and landscape are natural appearing. There is some recreational use of the area in both the winter and the summer by backcountry hikers and skiers. Dry Gulch starts along the continental divide and flows down nearly 3 miles till it hits the east/west interstate highway (I-70). I-70 is a significant access route to the area, with very high traffic volumes. I-70 creates significant impacts to the surrounding area, including vehicular noise, excess sediment, air pollutants, and trash. There are no formal trails or infrastructure through the area.

Dry Gulch is within an hour of the Denver metro area. Around the Clear Creek Ranger district there are other gulches and mountain slopes that have a similar settings and are within an hour's drive from Denver. A short list of similar places are Berthoud pass, Jones pass, Butler gulch, Herman gulch, Guanella pass, Mt Evans, Grizzly gulch, Stevens gulch, Kearny gulch, Grays peak, Torey peak, and Loveland pass.

Loveland has a Special Use Permit that runs to the middle of the gulch all along the valley. The Loveland guided snow cat tour would be located in the upper alpine area of Dry Gulch above the timberline. Partially on the SUP and partially on the adjacent northern side of the gulch on the south facing slope.

FOREST PLAN DIRECTION & COMPLIANCE

The forest service manages lands to provide resources for the nation including recreation and travel. To organize and give area specific guidance guidelines and prescriptions on the forest are split into subdivisions called Management Areas. The Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest 1997 Forest Plan has 21 Management Areas. The table below shows the Management Area (MA) that the Dry Gulch outfitter guide project takes place.

Management Area	Geographic area
8.22 Ski-Based Resorts	- Loveland Pass

Management Emphasis:

Continue to provide day-use developed alpine skiing and snowboarding opportunities and facilities.

Continue to provide day-use dispersed recreational opportunities at Loveland Pass and Mine Dumps areas, including undeveloped backcountry alpine and Nordic skiing and snowboarding. Provide trails and other facilities to concentrate and accommodate recreational use within 1.5 miles on either side of Loveland Pass. Accommodate both winter and summer use at high levels. Provide loop trails, interpretation, and viewing areas.

Protect the wildlife migration corridor over the Eisenhower Tunnel, which functions as a land bridge over I-70.

Recognize proposals for possible expansion of Loveland Valley Ski Area to the east along the north-facing slope of Mount Sniktau.

Additional Forest Plan guidance for recreational management within the project area includes:

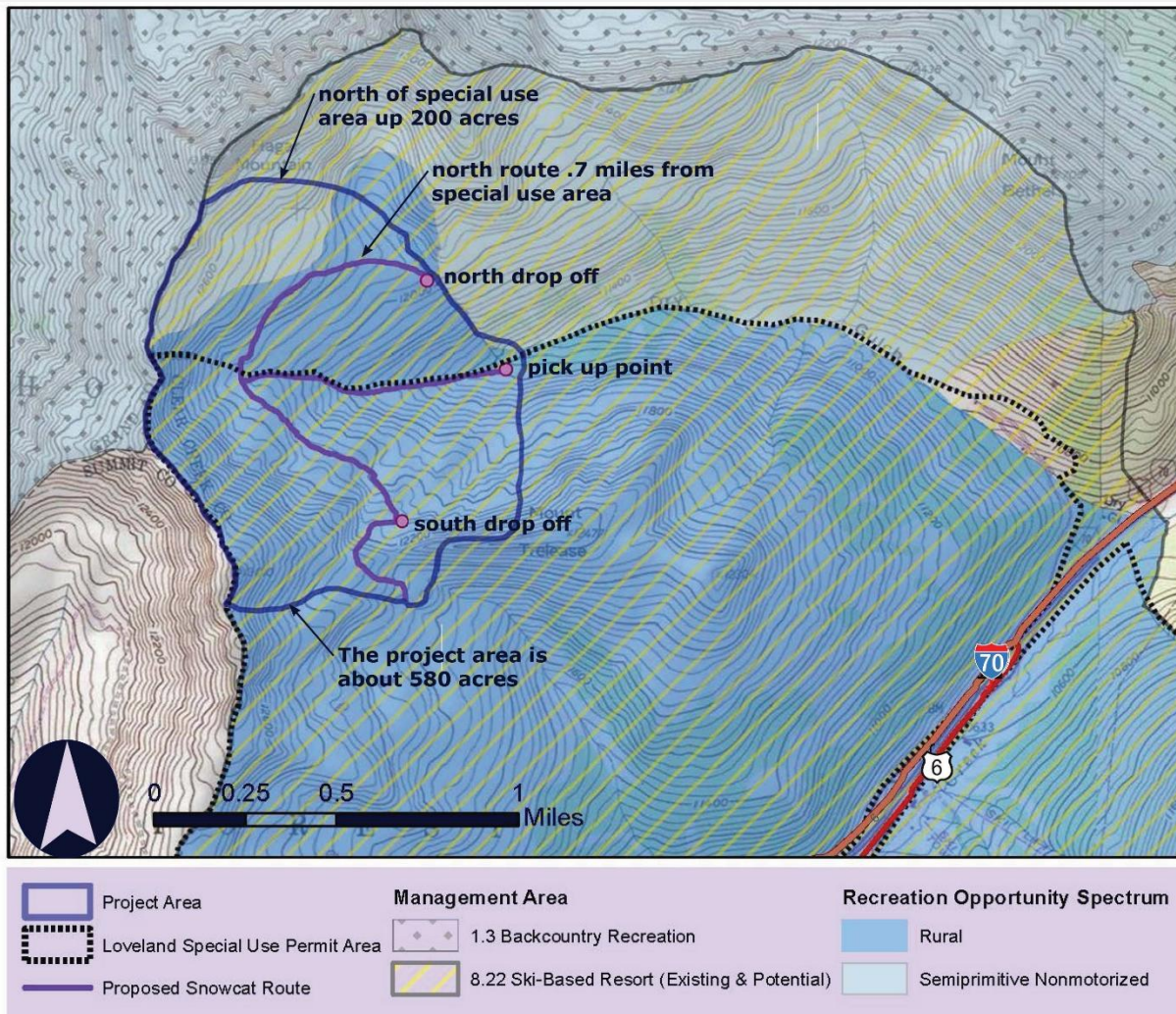
1. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum - Rural Area is characterized by substantially modified natural environment. Resource modification and utilization practices are to enhance specific recreation activities and to maintain vegetative cover and soil. Sights and sounds of humans are readily evident. And interaction between users is often moderate to high. A considerable number of facilities are designed for use by a large number of people. Facilities are often provided for special activities. Moderate densities are provided far away from developed sites. Facilities for intense motorized use and parking are available. Probably for experience affiliation with individuals and groups is prevalent, as is convenience of sites and opportunities these factors

are generally more important than the setting of the physical environment. Opportunities for wildland challenges. Risk taking and testing of outdoor skills are generally unimportant except for specific activates like downhill skiing for which challenge and risk taking are important elements.

2. *Arapaho-Roosevelt Forest Land Management Plan Section 4. 134.* Goal (GO) Encourage outfitters and guides to provide desired recreational experiences within the resource capacity of the area.

Recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS)

ROS	Forest Plan goals
Rural	Forest Plan Section 4 133. (GO) Ensure that all management activities are consistent with the adopted Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class as shown on ROS decision map enclosed with this document.



Forest Plan management and Recreation opportunity spectrum with proposed guided tour area.

PROPOSED ACTION EFFECTS

Definition: The proposed action is the addition of Dry Gulch guided snow cat tours in a total of 580 acres of the upper Dry Gulch area. Snow cats would carry up to 16 people in a group. The group would have guided tours that would have the opportunity to get in 5 to 7 runs before the tour is over. Then the group would shuttle back to lift 9 in the ski area. There is the potential for 2 groups a day to take the tour. One in the morning and one in the afternoon. Depending on booking there would be up to 32 people making approximately 200 runs in a day. In order to prepare for area safety some days before tour groups go out to Dry Gulch there will be avalanche control measures taken. Mainly through tossed explosives to shown areas on the site.

Direct Effects:

Access:

The project area is located in the upper south west end of Dry Gulch to the ridge line. The area of the project is 580 acres which is about 29% of the total 2000 acres of Dry Gulch. The most used part of the project area will be a zone between the drop-off and pick-up points so less than the 29% of the Dry Gulch is the actual used area. Access by existing backcountry skiers is not proposed to be restricted in this area. Access by resort back country skiers would

be limited by travel of the snow cat to the north and south drop off or pick up spots. Tour customers will park at Loveland's parking lot and travel up by chairlift to the pickup area by chair lift 9. There will be no tour access from the informal parking area at the bottom of Dry Gulch adjacent to I-70. The snow cat will enter the valley from the south west corner of Dry Gulch following the route shown on the map and leave the same way. This will open up access for Loveland guests to the dry gulch. 71% of the gulch will remain as is in terms of access and use. Use in the upper part of the valley will be shared. There are 2 existing snow cat skiing opportunities in the area. Snow cat skiing

within 1 hour of Denver in the clear creek district include Jones Pass, the ridge at Loveland. The existing Loveland snow cat is not a guided tour but self-determined skiing while the Jones pass snow cat skiing is a guided tour. There are other

snow cat skiing opportunities more than an hour from Denver. Several back country skiing opportunities can also be found around the Clear Creek ranger district. Some with similar settings have been listed in the Existing Recreation Setting section above. If the proposed action is enacted, the existing use patterns would not be curtailed and if visitors wish to there are options to continue backcountry skiing with similar ease of access throughout the clear creek ranger district.

Area in acres of potential backcountry ski area in the Clear Creek District	
Area	Acres
Berthoud Pass	1,000
Butler Gulch	2,700
Dry Gulch	2,000
Grays Peak	2,700
Grizzley Gulch	3,000
Grays Peak	2,700
Guenella Pass	3,000
Loveland Pass	800
Total Area	17,900

Area for Special use permit	Acres
Dry Gulch	580
% out of available acres in Clear Creek Ranger District.	3.2%

Winter Social setting:

The current social setting is a natural looking alpine valley with low visitation. Chances to encounter other people are low. There is no documentation of quantity of people visiting in the winter only that people do visit the area infrequently for winter recreation. Most of the site is above tree line descending down through uppermost trees to a clearing by the creek. The proposed modification to vegetation is minimal because most of the planned use area routes are above snow mostly above tree line. Also the planned activity is meant to be natural looking as part of the skier experience. This minimal approach is intended to resemble natural patterns typical of the area.

The proposal will bring more skiers to the area than currently visit. Up to 16 skiers in the morning and another 16 in the afternoon. This will change the chance for encounters with other people in the upper Dry Gulch. The sense of seclusion will be affected in the upper gulch. There will be about 2.7 people at one time per acre in the project area. The action will change the current social setting by adding up to 32 people per day and 16 people at any one time in winter using the project area. The gulch outside of the outfitter guide tour area will remain as secluded as it is now. The change to setting will be in the sight and sound of the people and snow cat in view depending on where in the gulch the person is. In the valley and among the trees this will be out of site and for a time out of hearing. Above the tree line there will be potential to see and hear people and or the snow cat. Because of the Forest plan direction for Dry Gulch management area 8.22 and Rural ROS for the project area, the proposed changes would be within the planned use for the Dry Gulch.

Sound:

Dry Gulch opens to highway 70 just to the east side of the Eisenhower tunnel. According to CDOT the tunnel averages 28000 vehicles a day according to CDOT. The decibels of highway traffic can be 70 to 85 decibels. While there is no data on the decibels from the specific snow cat that would be used for the tours, the sound of a diesel truck is about 85 decibels. The snow cat having a diesel engine could have a similar range of sound intensity. The decibel level of traffic noise in the Dry Gulch is unknown; however, sound is mitigated by distance. Using the inverse square law on sound, Sound intensity from a point source may be reduced by up to 28 decibels a mile away from the source. The project area of operation is about 2.3 miles from the entrance of the gulch. The proposed project area is about a mile from the top of MT Trelease and 2 miles from the peak of Mt. Bethel. The highway is about 1.2 miles from the peak of Mt Trelease. The peak of Mt. Bethel is about a mile from the highway. The sound of vehicles and people in the dry gulch area will depending on distance to the snow cat and the highway. Another influence on sound in the Dry gulch is wind. 15 mile an hour wind can be heard at 85 decibels. This can sometimes mask or drowned out other more distant sounds.

The sounds in the valley will change. The most changed areas will be near the tour area where the snow cat will be operating. This will not be a complete change as there are existing sounds of the highway in the area. Depending on a forest visitors proximity to the project area, windy peaks or highway there will be varying levels of the sounds of nature and the sounds of vehicles. Forest visitors in the center of the valley that are exposed to winds and highway sounds will have a similar experience of vehicular background sounds. Visitors in the upper valley will experience the snow cat sounds louder; however, because the forest management area is 8.22 and the ROS is rural the sounds of vehicles and people would be consistent with the forest plan.

Indirect Effects:

Access:

In order for Loveland's snow cat and customers to be safe in the Dry Gulch Loveland will be conducting avalanche control treatment on the slopes above the use zone in the project area. Safety issues for forest visitors that are not Loveland customers accessing the area during avalanche control treatments would be considered in the special use permit process. It is typical and expected that Loveland would devise a plan for safety of Loveland guests and other non-Loveland forest visitors to Dry Gulch. This plan would be reviewed by Forest service staff before special use permits are issued.

Winter Social Setting:

Displacement effects on other remote valleys is expected to be negligible.

Cumulative Effects:

Population in the Denver area is continually growing. Looking at Census and Forest Service National Visitor Use Monitoring records at population growth on the Front Range as it correlates to forest visitors revealed that metro area growth did not proportionately translate to general or ski area forest visits. Ski areas did receive 2% more skier visits than in 2010 while general forest visits went down. The proposed guided tour could potentially add skiers coming to the Loveland area for snow cat guided tours. Up to 32 more skiers a day. There is also potential for growth in back country skiing. There are other factors besides population growth that could attribute to this boost in ski area visits. The 32 more skiers is static and small number out of the tens of thousands of visitors that come to ski areas on the Arapahoe national forest on a daily basis. The project would not significantly contribute to cumulative effects of use and growth of use of the clear creek ranger district.

CONCLUSION:

The proposed action in Dry Gulch will have changes to its recreational setting both social encounters and ease of access to the upper Dry Gulch.

Setting & Access – The Proposed project will have some social changes to part of the dry gulch area that current winter users will notice; however, it will be in keeping with planed management of the site. Current winter users will not have sole use of the valley. The outfitter guide proposal will bring up to 32 people per day through the winter. Those seeking seclusion during back country skiing will be need to ski the lower part of Dry Gulch or other nearby valleys and mountain sides to find a more remote setting for the back country skiing activity. There also are other places for this on the district within one hour from Denver including Loveland pass, Berthoud pass, and Herman gulch. Current users who are interested in back country skiing without concern for remoteness will still be able to access the entire Dry Gulch area. Those visiting Loveland seeking easier access or entry into the sport of backcountry skiing or snow cat guided skiing would gain an opportunity in Dry gulch.

Skied out areas may be of concern between the snow cat drop off zones and the pick-up point. Areas above and around these points as well as Mt Trelease, Mt. Bethel and the lower valley will not have a difference in snow usage.

Sound - Sounds of vehicles will be strongest near the highway and the snow cat the center of the valley will be the area most removed from the sound. Tolerance for the vehicle noise will vary. It is difficult to account for sound displacement. Sound differences may be noticed but are within the description of the setting of the area in the forest plan.

Avalanche safety for non-tour guests is not yet completed and will be completed before the issuance of a special use permit

The proposed action is consistent with forest planning. Because the project is in management area 8.22 this valley was planned to be a potential or future ski area. This would be consistent with that forest plan and still allow for access by forest visitors to use this area for back country skiing and other snow activities. The ROS also overlaps the project area in keeping with forest goal "133 (GO) Ensure that all management activities are consistent with the adopted Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class shown on the ROS decision map" FLRMP Section 4... the vehicle travel and social use boundary of this project are within the rural ROS on the map including the section that is outside of the ski area use permit area (SUP). Sounds of vehicles and people are noted and are consistent with the forest plan in management areas designated 8.22 and (ROS) areas designated Rural.

<i>Design Criteria</i>	<i>Actions to meet recreation management standards</i>
NA	NA

<i>Recreation Management</i>	<i>Information for any potential special use permit considerations</i>
Avalanche mitigation safety plan	If the proposal is approved the ski area would create a plan of action and communication to ensure safety of non-tour back country skiers to avoid risk and injury during avalanche mitigation operations. This would also be a part of the outfitter guide special use permit reviewed and approved by a forest service representative.